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Agenda item 8

PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AND THE PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[8 August 1997]

1. Turkey has for many years now been claiming to have become democratic in accordance with the universal standards of democracy. It also claims to have signed most of the international treaties guaranteeing respect for human rights, children and society. Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations, has a population of over 20 million Kurds whose legitimate rights are not recognized. More than 3,000 Kurdish villages have been razed to the ground in a blatant act of ethnic cleansing.

2. The European Parliament in its most recent resolution on the invasion of south Kurdistan by the Turkish army, dated 17 July 1997, condemned the invasion of 14 May 1997 when more than 50,000 Turkish soldiers entered Iraqi Kurdistan; they have not yet completely withdrawn. How can Turkey so easily violate the territorial integrity of a foreign country, threatening the

stability of the entire region, violating international law and defying international public opinion? Villages were bombed in the course of this operation and civilians killed. In addition, Kurdish refugees from Turkey in Ninova, a camp located in the operations zone, were threatened and deprived of all humanitarian aid. In July, 18 children and 3 elderly people in the camp died for lack of the food and medicines supplied by UNHCR. The fact that journalists are forbidden access to the region reveals the serious nature of the situation.

3. The European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union have since their inception adopted numerous resolutions on the human rights situation in Turkey. The European Union has also expressed its concern on several occasions. Such statements have not subsequently been fully supported by the United Nations, nor have they been accompanied by specific pressures. The situation has thus continued to deteriorate.

4. The Turkish State, supported by some NATO members, has also taken advantage of the consequences of the drugs traffic. The German courts have confirmed the involvement of high-level Turkish authorities in this traffic and the anti-mafia commission of the Turkish Parliament has clearly revealed that the Turkish authorities are implicated in the international drugs traffic. According to this commission, more than $50 billion of drug money will mean many more victims if the organizers are not arrested and tried. This money is especially used to finance the paramilitary forces and, the 60,000 village "protection agents" and for the purchase of new weapons.

5. If Turkey maintains this approach today, it is because the war in Kurdistan is largely financed with this money. Does the United Nations have the means to prevent Turkey from filling its coffers with dirty money? Will the United Nations be able to bring its legal and political weight to bear to require Turkey to comply with the universal conditions of respect for human rights?

6. The Kurdish question continues to be an essential factor of the instability which is directly linked to the failure to respect human rights in Turkey, and even in the Middle East overall. The last attempt by the Turkish army to occupy southern Kurdistan was foiled by the Kurdish resistance, which once again demonstrated that until the Kurdish question is resolved by peaceful and political means, the region could at any time undergo civil war. The strategic alliance between Turkey, Israel and the United States has given a new dimension to the conflict opposing States and particularly at the military and geopolitical levels in the Middle East. This spells serious danger for human rights among all the peoples of the region.

7. The Turkish State, foiled in southern Kurdistan (northern Iraq), is attempting to mount a campaign of provocation, disinformation and repression against civil and democratic organizations in Turkey and elsewhere in the world. The five sections of the Human Rights Association (IHD) in Malatya, Diyarbakir, Izmir, Konya and Balikkesir have been closed down and 31 officials of the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), including its President, Mr. Bozlak, have been given heavy prison sentences. At the present time, more than 150 writers and journalists are in prison. The four Kurdish deputies of the

Democracy Party (DEP) are still in prison. The situation of political prisoners is alarming. In September 1996, in Diyarbakir, following a military and police raid on a prison, 10 seriously injured Kurdish prisoners were beaten to death in hospital. A special commission of the Turkish Parliament confirmed this crime against humanity, but to date not one of the persons responsible has been brought to court.

8. Before the approval of the customs union between Turkey and the European Union and its ratification by the European Parliament, on 13 December 1995, Turkey had made some minor changes to its Constitution, considered at the time by many European parliamentarians, by the Kurds and by public democratic opinion in Turkey to be "virtual changes", as was subsequently confirmed. The European and United States Governments hope that a medium-term integration and rapprochement policy, with close cooperation in the political, economic, military and diplomatic spheres, will bring Turkey closer to universal democratic values.

9. The Commission of the European Union, which had made a plea for the customs union with Turkey in its report of 16 July 1997 on the expansion of the European Union, asked that Turkey should not be included among the candidate countries since the persistent use of torture, disappearances and extrajudicial executions despite the Government's reiterated official commitment to put an end to such practices raised the question of the real capacity of the civil authorities to supervise the activities of the security forces and keep them under control.

10. The European Parliament, in its resolution of 13 December 1995, appealed to the Turkish Government, the PKK and other Kurdish organizations to use every available mechanism to find a non-violent and political solution to the Kurdish issue; it asked the PKK to abandon violence and requested the Turkish Government and the Grand National Assembly to lift the curfew in force in the south-east and to consider ways of allowing citizens of Kurdish origin to express their cultural identity while guaranteeing and respecting Turkey's territorial unity.

11. In reply to the PKK's ceasefire declaration of 15 December 1995, the European Parliament stated in its resolution of 18 January 1996 that it welcomed the announcement of a unilateral ceasefire by the President of the PKK, perceiving in it a first positive reaction to its appeal of 13 December 1995; it expressed the hope that the Government of Ankara would see in it a positive contribution to the search for a peaceful solution to the problem and invited all the Turkish parties concerned to take advantage of the opportunity offered to study ways and means of opening up a national dialogue with the objective of finding a political and non-violent solution to the problems in Turkey's south-east region.

12. Turkey has not kept its promises. It is severely criticized by all the human rights organizations. For the first time, Amnesty International has carried out a special seven-month campaign to denounce human rights violations in Turkey. In the prisons, military posts and police stations torture is still systematic. The political parties HADEP, HEP, DEP and ÖZDEP risk being

outlawed. The paramilitary forces have still not been dismantled, disappearances continue and summary executions are routine practice among the security forces.

13. Will Mr. Yilmaz's new Government be able to keep the promises made to the United Nations, to the Council of Europe and to Turkish, Kurdish and world public opinion? Will Europe really use the international instruments to bring about democratic changes in Turkey? Pax Christi International does not ask the European Parliament to suspend its relations with Turkey but simply to insist until the Ankara Governments initiate a process of negotiated solution to the Kurdish question.

14. The war which has existed for 13 years between the Turkish State and the PKK has already caused the loss of more than 30,000 lives. These figures increase daily, weakening both Turkish and Kurdish society. Turkey is on the road to social and political chaos. The division between Turks and Kurds is becoming more and more pronounced.

15. We note that the PKK has on several occasions expressed public support for a peaceful negotiated solution which respects Turkey's territorial integrity. During a television debate on 26 June 1997, Abdullah Öcalan, President of the PKK, made the following statement, aimed particularly at the international organizations: "How many of your decisions - for peace, for human rights, for a political solution - have we failed to respect? What have you asked that we have not respected? We are really and truly not responsible. Since our people is not represented in the international bodies and thus has no means of defending its interests, it does not deserve such injustice. We would like to discuss together what can be done for our peoples in Turkey or Kurdistan, counting a significant period of ceasefire. We would like to explain logically to them, with no strings attached, what road must be followed to reach an equitable solution. In order to stop the blood-letting in Kurdistan and to ensure peace and stability we expect the United Nations, as an international organization, to take a firm stand on the crimes of the Turkish State in Kurdistan. The United Nations has long experience of finding political solutions to conflicts which give rise to the most serious human rights violations. How long is the United Nations going to ignore the bloodiest conflict in the Middle East?"

16. The European Union and the European Parliament have been saying for months that the Kurdish question in Turkey can only be solved by political means. We call upon the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to condemn the human rights violations committed against the Kurds and to invite the Governments concerned, and first and foremost the Government of Turkey, to respect their commitments to the United Nations. The Sub-Commission cannot ignore the plight of the Kurdish people or the human rights tragedy involved.